

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

Cable Installations

I live in a rural community and my house is located some distance from the street. Can the cable operator refuse to provide me with cable service? In some rural areas, a cable operator may refuse to provide cable service. In order to determine whether a cable operator is required to provide service to your home, you should contact your local town or city to determine the specific areas in your community that the cable operator must serve. Each municipality in Massachusetts is responsible for negotiating a license agreement with the cable operator. Massachusetts law requires that these license agreements contain a description of the areas to be served within the municipality. In rural communities, the license may contain a more detailed provision which limits the cable company's obligation to provide cable to the more densely populated sections of the town.

The cable operator has given me an installation quote that is much higher than the rate listed on their rate card. Can the cable operator charge me more than the standard installation rate? Cable companies are allowed, under Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") regulations, to charge installation rates based on the actual cost of performing the installation. If you live a considerable distance from the existing distribution system (i.e. the utility pole where cable is connected), installation may cost more because additional materials and time are required. In addition, FCC consumer service standards may be adopted and enforced at the local level by your city or town. If adopted, these rules define a "standard installation" as those located up to 125 feet from the existing distribution system. If your house is located more than 125 feet from the existing distribution system, you may be required to pay for the installation costs associated with anything beyond the 125 feet. Some municipalities have defined a standard installation in the license agreement negotiated with the cable operator. You should contact your city or town for more specific information about the terms of the local license and the enforcement of the FCC's consumer service standards.

Is the cable operator allowed to make me wait several weeks for a service installation? If your city or town has adopted the FCC's consumer service standards, the cable company may be required to perform standard installations within seven business days after an order has been placed. These consumer service standards also allow your city or town to require that cable operators set an appointment window for installations at a specific time or within a four-hour time block. Your city or town may also prohibit a cable company from canceling an appointment with a customer after the close of business on the business day prior to the scheduled appointment. However, not all municipalities have adopted the FCC's consumer service standards. Some municipalities have additional consumer service standards spelled out in the license agreement negotiated between the municipality and the cable operator. You should, therefore, contact your municipality to determine the consumer service standards that are in place.

What information should I receive before I subscribe to cable television?

Massachusetts regulations require cable operators to give potential subscribers written notice of its services, rates, charges, and billing practices before a subscription agreement is reached. The billing practices notice should include the cable operator's policies regarding frequency and timing of bills, payment requirements necessary to avoid account delinquency, billing dispute resolution procedures, and late payment penalties.

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